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ABSTRACT

This study investigated similarities and differences in the requesting behavior presented by American and European speakers in English and Spanish. Two specific research questions were addressed: (1) whether European or American speakers and native or non-native speakers use the same request strategies in English and Spanish; and (2) whether European or American speakers and native or non-native speakers modify their requests in the same way by using mitigating supportives. Subjects were 106 students at the University of the Basque Country (Spain), 29 Americans and 78 Europeans with various first languages (Swedish, Spanish, Norwegian, Italian, French, Greek, Danish, German, Portuguese). Data were obtained with a general background questionnaire and a discourse completion test. Results indicate that although the conventionally indirect strategy is generally preferred, Americans use more direct and less conventionally indirect strategies than European speakers in English. Americans also use fewer mitigating supportives in both English and Spanish. These characteristics produce an effect of directness in American speech. The English used by Europeans shows pragmatic characteristics closer to those of British English than American English. In Spanish requests, the pattern emerging is the opposite of that in English requests: learners use the conventionally indirect strategy less often than native speakers, and use fewer mitigating supportives. Contains 35 references. (MSE)

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AMERICAN VS. EUROPEAN REQUESTS: DO SPEAKERS USE THE SAME STRATEGIES?

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INTRODUCTION

The cross-linguistic study of speech acts has been approached from different perspectives including theoretical pragmatics, ethnographic studies on culture and anthropology, and linguistic studies on contrastive and interlanguage pragmatics. This paper analyses a particular speech act, 'requests', from a cross-cultural and interlanguage perspective by comparing the production of European and American speakers on the one hand and that of native speakers and learners on the other.

The study of speech acts from a linguistic perspective either comparing the linguistic realization of speech acts in different languages ('contrastive pragmatics') or the speech acts produced by native speakers and second language learners ('interlanguage pragmatics') can be relevant for several reasons. First, it can contribute to theoretical pragmatics because it can shed light on the universal principles which govern the production of speech acts and the degree to which these rules of language use vary from language to language. The cross-linguistic study of speech acts has been related to Grice's (1975) conversational principles, and Brown and Levinson (1978), Lakoff (1975), Goffman (1967) and Leech's (1983) politeness theories (Kasper, 1990; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Tanaka & Kawade, 1982). Second, cross-linguistic comparisons of speech act realizations can also contribute to studies in cross-cultural communication.

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The study of speech as a cultural phenomenon and its role in cultural identity has shown that different communities vary in their production and interpretation of linguistic behaviour (Gumperz, 1982a,b). The linguistic approach to the study of speech acts can not only identify but also provide a detailed description of the interactional styles corresponding to different speech communities. Finally, the cross-linguistic study of speech acts can also contribute to the development of second language acquisition research by identifying the strategies used by learners in the production of speech acts. This approach is commonly referred as 'interlanguage pragmatics' and has been defined as *'the study of non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language'* (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, 3).

The analysis of speech acts from a linguistic perspective has focused both on the perception and production of speech acts in experimental and natural settings (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). The results of the studies conducted so far have revealed that there is both a universal and a language specific component in the realization of speech acts. There is a universal pragmatic knowledge which is shared across languages and explains, for example, that the same basic strategies (direct, conventionally indirect and unconventionally indirect or hints) are used in the realization of requests (Blum-Kulka & Olhstain, 1984). At the same time, there are different interactional styles and important cross-linguistic differences in the selection, distribution and realization of speech acts. For example, German speakers are more direct than British English speakers when uttering requests

(House & Kasper, 1981) and Hebrew speakers are more direct than American English speakers (Blum-Kulka, 1982, 1983).

Interlanguage pragmatics studies speech acts from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines the tradition of interlanguage studies with the study of speech comprehension and production in context. Interlanguage pragmatics is also related to the concept of communicative competence and specifically to that of pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990). Pragmatic or actional competence is a component of communicative competence that has been defined as *'the ability to convey and understand communicative intent by performing and interpreting speech acts and language functions'* (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994). Several researchers distinguish two dimensions when referring to pragmatic competence: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983) or the pragmalinguistic component and the cultural filter (Blum-Kulka, 1991). The pragmalinguistic component refers to the particular structure and functions that specific languages use in speech act realization. The sociopragmatic or cultural component refers to the appropriateness of speech acts according to specific social and situational conditions.

Lack of pragmatic competence or pragmatic failure is more easily observable than pragmatically competent language use. Pragmatic failure can take place at different levels. In the case of pragmalinguistic failure the learner uses linguistic elements which do not correspond to native forms and can produce breakdowns in communication or socially inapropriate utterances. At the sociopragmatic and cultural level, the learner produces

an inappropriate utterance because he/she is not aware of the social and cultural rules affecting speech act realization in a particular language. These rules can involve a different perception of social psychological elements such as social distance, relative power and status or legitimization of a specific behaviour.

Pragmatic failure differs from other types of failure because it is not easily recognizable by interlocutors who may judge the speaker as being impolite or uncooperative or attribute the pragmatic errors to the speaker's personality. Moreover, pragmatic failure is common not only among students with low proficiency in the target language but also among advanced language learners presenting a good command of grammatical and lexical elements.

A speech act that has been the focus of attention in interlanguage pragmatics is that of requests. Requests are pre-event acts which have been considered 'face-threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1978) as they impose the speaker's interests on the hearer. For this reason, requests in different languages present a rich variety of strategies and modifiers necessary to mitigate their impositive effect. Requests are complex speech acts which involve a relationship of different elements. These elements have been identified by Blum-Kulka (1991) as the 'request schema' which includes requestive goals subject to a cultural filter, linguistic encoding (strategies, perspective and modifiers), situational parameters (distance, power, legitimization) and the social meaning of the request according to cultural and situational factors.

The cross-linguistic comparison of requests uttered by native and non-native speakers has revealed that there are similarities and differences in the selection and distribution of linguistic elements. Non-native speakers have been reported to use a more restrictive and less complex requesting repertoire than native speakers (Blum-Kulka, 1982, 1991; House & Kasper, 1987; Faerch & Kasper, 1989). When the requesting strategies of native speakers and learners have been compared, learners have been found to be more direct than native speakers in some studies (Tanaka 1988; Koike, 1989; Fukushima, 1990; House & Kasper, 1987) but not in others (Blum-Kulka 1982, 1991). Learners' requests have been consistently reported to differ from native speakers' in the way learners modify their requests externally by adding more mitigating supportives than native speakers. The most common mitigating supportive is the grounder, which provides reasons and explanations to justify the need to make a request. This behaviour, known as the 'waffle phenomenon' affects the length of the utterance and has been observed in interlanguage behaviour in Hebrew (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986); English (House & Kasper, 1987; Faerch & Kasper, 1989) and German (Faerch & Kasper, 1989). Learners have also been found to share with native speakers sensitivity to contextual constraints when they select requesting strategies (Blum-Kulka, 1982, Kasper 1989).

The most common explanation for pragmatic failure is pragmatic negative transfer (Thomas, 1983) defined as *'the influence of L1 pragmatic competence on IL pragmatic knowledge that differs from the L2 target'* (Kasper, 1993, 10). Pragmatic negative transfer can take place at the pragmalinguistic and

sociopragmatic levels but cannot account for all types of pragmatic failure. In some cases, such as the 'waffling phenomenon', learners present pragmatic behaviour that is different from both the L1 and the L2 and seems to be characteristic of interlanguage. Pragmatic competence and pragmatic failure can reflect interlanguage processes which are common in second language acquisition such as overgeneralization, simplification and reduction. Pragmatic competence is also interrelated to other dimensions of communicative competence and pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic failure can be caused by lack of linguistic or sociolinguistic competence.

Research in contrastive and interlanguage pragmatics and particularly the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), have proved to be relevant for the study of second language acquisition, cross-cultural and theoretical pragmatics. Nevertheless, further studies including different first and second languages are still necessary in order to confirm previous findings and provide a deeper understanding of pragmatic competence in cross-linguistic communication. The requesting behaviour of European and American speakers in English and Spanish can be extremely relevant not only for its contribution to interlanguage pragmatics but also for cross-cultural studies on the language behaviour in European-American communication.

This paper aims at investigating the similarities and differences in the requesting behaviour presented by American and European speakers in English and Spanish. The specific research questions address those aspects of requesting behaviour which

have received more attention in the literature: requesting strategies and mitigating supportives. The research questions are the following: i) Do European/American speakers and native/non-native speakers use the same request strategies in English and Spanish? ii) Do European/American speakers and native/non-native speakers modify their requests in the same way by using mitigating supportives?

METHOD

Participants were 106 university students, 29 Americans and 78 Europeans with various first languages (Swedish, Spanish, Norwegian, Italian, French, Greek, Danish, German, Portuguese). American and European (non-Spanish) subjects attended Spanish language courses at the University of the Basque Country while Spanish subjects were undergraduates majoring in English Studies at the University of the Basque Country. Non-native speakers of English (European, including Spanish) reported a higher level of proficiency in English than non-native speakers of Spanish (European non-Spanish and American) in Spanish.

The data were obtained via a general background questionnaire and a discourse completion test, based on the CCSARP, which contained four request situations and four apology situations. The data presented in this paper come from the request situations which included the following: a) A teacher asks a student to get a book from the library; b) A student asks a teacher for handouts given in a previous class; c) You ask a colleague to make a long distance phone call from his/her

apartment; d) A traffic warden asks a driver to move his/her car. The DCTs were codified according to the CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). Only two aspects of request behaviour will be analysed in this paper: the request strategy and mitigating supportive moves.

RESULTS

The most frequent strategy used in English and Spanish when uttering requests was the conventionally indirect, that is, preparatories (Can I..?, Could I..?), and suggestory formula (How about..?). This strategy was used in 85.2% of the English requests and 72.9% of the Spanish requests. The direct strategy, mood derivable (Give me...), explicit performative (I am asking..), hedged performative (I must ask) and locution derivable (you must/should/have to) was used in 10% of the English requests and 25.37% of the Spanish requests. The unconventionally indirect strategy (strong and mild hints) was used in 4.8% of the English requests and 1.72% of the Spanish requests. The percentages corresponding to the distribution of the conventionally indirect strategy across the different linguistic groups are presented in table 1.

TABLE I **REQUEST STRATEGIES**					
CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT	BOOK	HANDOUTS	PHONE	CAR	TOTAL
ENGLISH					
EUROPEAN ENGLISH (L2)	93.8	87.5	87.4	80.4	87.27
AMERICAN ENGLISH (L1)	79.3	82.8	79.3	71.4	78.2
SPANISH					
EUROPEAN SPANISH (L2)	65.9	68.4	71.4	53.7	64.85
AMERICAN SPANISH (L2)	46.4	72.4	80.8	57.1	64.17
SPANISH SPANISH (L1)	95.8	79.2	80.9	83.3	84.8

It can be observed that in English, both native and non-native speakers use the conventionally indirect strategy less frequently in the 'car' situation in which a policeman asks a driver to move his/her car. American speakers use this strategy less often than European speakers in the four situations. Native speakers of American English tend to use more direct strategies in requests not only because they use the conventionally indirect strategy more often but also because they use the direct strategy in 17.47% of their requests and Europeans in 7.8%.

The situational variation is less consistent in Spanish requests. European non-native speakers of Spanish use the conventionally direct strategy more often in the 'car' situation, Americans in the 'book' situation and native speakers in the 'handout' situation. As compared to the English data, a different pattern is found in Spanish requests as learners of Spanish are more direct than native speakers. There are no important differences in strategy type between American and European learners of Spanish. When comparing the request strategies used in both languages it can be observed that the percentage of conventionally indirect strategies corresponding to native speakers of Spanish (84.8) is closer to the percentages

corresponding to English requests than to Spanish requests produced by learners. Native speakers of Spanish also use the direct strategy less often (13.12%) than American (34.1%) and European (33.8%) learners.

The percentages pertaining the use of mitigating supportives by the different groups in English and Spanish are presented in table II.

TABLE II **MITIGATING SUPPORTIVES IN REQUESTS**					
CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT	BOOK	HANDOUTS	PHONE	CAR	TOTAL
ENGLISH					
EUROPEAN ENGLISH (L2)	27.5	59.5	88.0	71.8	61.7
AMERICAN ENGLISH (L1)	21.7	41.7	68.2	70.0	50.4
SPANISH					
EUROPEAN SPANISH (L2)	7.4	50.0	76.7	81.8	53.97
AMERICAN SPANISH (L2)	7.7	38.1	71.4	62.5	44.92
SPANISH SPANISH (L1)	26.1	76.3	73.7	77.5	63.4

Non-native speakers of English use more mitigating supportives than native speakers in the four situations when uttering requests in English. Both groups use less supportives in 'book' situation in which the teacher asks a student for a book than in the 'phone' and 'car' situations.

In Spanish less supportives are also used in the 'book' situation and more in the 'phone' and 'car' situations. Native speakers of Spanish use more mitigsting supportives than non-native speakers and European non-native speakers of Spanish use more supportives than Americans. Americans use less supportives than Europeans both in English and Spanish and non-natives use more supportives than natives in English but not in Spanish.

DISCUSSION

The analyses of the request strategies and mitigating supportives used by Americans and Europeans in English and Spanish show some interesting patterns along the cross-cultural dimension of Americans vs. Europeans and the interlanguage dimension of native speakers vs. learners.

Regarding the cross-cultural dimension, it can be observed that even though the conventionally indirect strategy is the preferred strategy, Americans use more direct and less conventionally indirect strategies than European speakers in English. Moreover, Americans use less mitigating supportives both in English and Spanish. These two characteristics of American requests could produce an effect of directness in American speech. European English, which has been defined as *'the use of English by Europeans to communicate with other Europeans, including, but not restricted to, the British'* (Berns, 1994) seems to present some pragmatic characteristics which are closer to a native variety of European English (British English) than to American English. In fact, reports on the use of the conventionally indirect strategy by native speakers of British English are very close (about 90%) to the percentages found in this study (87%) (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). Nevertheless, the use of mitigating supportives by Europeans is much higher (61.7%) than previous reports on the use of supportives in British English (23%) (House, 1989, House & Kasper, 1987) and would provide supporting evidence for the 'waffle phenomenon'. Non-native European English would share some

pragmalinguistic characteristics with British English and at the same time present others which seem to be typically associated with non-native requesting behaviour.

Pragmatic competence in non-native European English has to be explained as related to the extensive use of English for communicative interaction among non-native speakers in Europe. In this context, the concept of 'pragmatic failure' is arguable as non-native European English does not necessarily have to be considered as a deviant variety of American or British English but as a relatively stable non-native variety presenting its own pragmatic characteristics.

In the case of Spanish requests, the pattern that emerges is the opposite of English requests. Learners use the conventionally indirect strategy less often than native speakers and they also use less mitigating supportives. The use of more direct strategies by language learners is not surprising and has been reported in previous research involving language varieties which use a large proportion of conventionally indirect strategies (Tanaka, 1988; Koike, 1989; Fukushima, 1990; House & Kasper, 1987). The data on mitigating supportives in Spanish seems to contradict previous data in which learners with different levels of proficiency have been reported to 'waffle' by producing more supportive moves than native speakers of either the first or the second language (House, 1989; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House and Kasper, 1987 Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986). We argue that the different behaviour presented by learners of English and Spanish can be explained in terms of language competence and the interdependence of the different dimensions

of communicative competence. As it has already been stated, non-native speakers of English reported a higher level of proficiency than non-native speakers of Spanish. In fact, European non-native speakers of English are university students majoring in English studies (native speakers of Spanish) or European students who study Spanish as an additional third, fourth or fifth language after studying English for a large number of years. On the contrary, in the case of Spanish, non-native speakers' competence can be labelled as 'lower intermediate' according to the learners' own reports and the language courses in which they are currently enrolled. Non-native speakers of English are expected to present the necessary linguistic resources to produce supportive moves and feel comfortable enough with the language so as to produce longer utterances. Non-native speakers of Spanish would have less linguistic resources at their disposal and prefer shorter utterances. A careful review of studies reporting that learners 'waffle' shows that learners who waffle are at the intermediate or advanced levels (House & Kasper, 1987; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986) and that learners at the lower intermediate level have been reported not to waffle (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986). These findings are supported not only by our data on English requests but also on Spanish requests as the latter do not contradict previous studies on this phenomenon but the interpretation of these studies as independent of second language competence (Edmondson & House, 1991). Our findings suggest that the interdependence among the different dimensions of communicative competence and the influence of linguistic competence should be regarded as crucial when explaining the

'waffle phenomenon'.

As far as sociopragmatic competence is concerned, the comparison of native and non-native speakers of English and Spanish reveals that both groups are aware of the different situations and use different degrees of directness according to the context, as previously reported (Blum-Kulka, 1982, Kasper, 1989, Rintell & Mitchell 1989). The comparison of English and Spanish indicates that even though contextual influence is observable in both cases, the pattern is more consistent in English and could be affected by linguistic competence.

Another finding of this study concerns the use of the conventionally indirect strategy by native speakers of Spanish. The fact that this strategy is very commonly used (84.8%) emphasizes the need to refer to language varieties rather than languages as it contradicts previous data on Argentinian Spanish (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989) in which the conventionally indirect strategy was only used by 60% of the population.

This study is limited to a small sample, to a specific data collection procedure (discourse completion test) and to two languages (Spanish and English). Further research involving more speech acts and more levels of proficiency as well as other data collection procedures are necessary to confirm the present findings and to determine the pragmatic characteristics of non-native European English, as well as the effect of different levels of proficiency on the 'waffle phenomenon'.

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